



## The Indigenization of Disney's Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) in China: From 'Snow Sister' and 'Dolly Girl' to Chinese Snow White (1940) and Princess Iron Fan (1941)

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# 10

## The indigenization of Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) in China: From 'Snow Sister' and 'Dolly Girl' to *Chinese* *Snow White* (1940) and *Princess* *Iron Fan* (1941)

*Yuanyuan Chen*

### Introduction

Walt Disney's first animated feature film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (David Hand, 1937) was released in Shanghai in June 1938. Thanks to the localized advertising and promotional strategies, it was a massive box-office success in China. The blockbuster hit was watched by 400,000 people and made more than 7 million RMB across the country.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will explore how Disney's *Snow White* was interpreted and indigenized in China during the 1930s and 1940s by examining the following four areas. The first section will investigate how Shanghai during the 1930s and 1940s – as a mixed, dynamic and unstable cosmopolitan metropolis – offered a perfect stage for novelties such as Hollywood film and Disney animation. The second section will examine how localized advertising and marketing

campaigns promoted *Snow White*, and how the film, in turn, bolstered the local economy and artistic creations. Third, by a short comparative analysis, I will rethink the film *Chinese Snow White*, a live-action remake of Disney's *Snow White* released in 1940. In the final section, the first Chinese animated feature *Princess Iron Fan* (Wan Guchan and Wan Laiming, 1941), which is widely considered as the Chinese version of *Snow White* in animation, will be compared with Disney's *Snow White*.

## Shanghai: An encounter with Disney

The settlement of Disney in Shanghai started over eighty years ago, as early as the 1930s. Despite that fact that during the 1930s and 1940s the country was suffering the ravages of the Second World War, Shanghai was an exceptional city that accommodated Disney's animated films. Marie-Claire Bergère describes Shanghai as the cradle of Chinese modernity – 'the international settlement, with its trading companies, banks, naval yards, and factories that had turned Shanghai into a world metropolis; and the French concession, the international settlement's younger sister, whose shady streets, fashion houses, literary bohemia, and militant revolutionaries had caused the town to be known as "the Paris of the East"'.<sup>2</sup> Shanghai had been opened up to the West ever since the Treaty of Nanking was signed in 1842, and it soon became a popular place for overseas residents. These foreign influences brought to the city not only modern technologies, such as electricity, telephones and trams, but also the new industry of leisure and entertainment, including cafés, horse racing and the cinema. Shanghai quickly became the primary city where Hollywood distributed its films and, consequently, the city that was most influenced by Hollywood culture in China.

Disney's first discussion in print in China occurred on 6 February 1930, introduced in an article titled '“Mickey the Mouse” Liked by Britons' which was published in *North China Daily News* (字林西報), an influential English-language newspaper in Shanghai. The author not only presented how much the critics in London enjoyed the film but also praised Mickey Mouse as 'a real creature of the present' that expresses a philosophy.<sup>3</sup> Afterwards, Disney and his cartoon stars soon became fashionable among the local population with a rapidly increasing presence in media from the period. The publications can be generally divided into two categories: those that introduce Walt Disney and the cartoon characters, such as the articles 'The Father of Mickey Mouse: Walt Disney's Successful Career' in *Movietone* (電聲) and 'Mickey Mouse Is Becoming a Star' in *Linglong* (玲瓏), and those serializing Disney's cartoon strips, which were vital ways to popularize their work in China prior to and alongside animated film screenings.<sup>4</sup>

Due to the fact that early animated shorts were usually screened before the feature film as a supplementary and the lack of reliable data, it is



hard to know when Disney animation was first shown in China.<sup>5</sup> Based on the archives of *North China Daily News*, a screening of the animated short *Midnight in a Toy Shop* (Wilfred Jackson, 1930) from Disney's *Silly Symphonies* series was advertised on 23 December 1931, accompanying the feature film *Meet the Wife* (Leslie Pearce, 1931) as a bonus attraction for the Theatre Imprint in Shanghai (Figure 10.1), which would indicate that Disney's animated films appeared in Chinese theatres at least as early as 1931.<sup>6</sup> An increasing number of local theatres soon began to show Disney's animations, and the audience responded to these films exceptionally well. Until 1935, Mikey became a household name in Shanghai and was deeply loved by the local audience.<sup>7</sup>

During the period of the Republic of China, the expansion of Disney in China can be divided into three phases. The period from 1930 to 1941 was the first 'golden era', a time when Disney became better known in Shanghai. Although the city was semi-occupied by the Japanese from 1937 to 1941, Shanghai was a 'Solitary Island' where the foreign concessions largely remained intact. It created an enclave of prosperity for film industry and offered the possibilities for Disney's continuous expansion in China. Animated films such as *Snow White* and *Pinocchio* (Ben Sharpsteen and Hamilton Luske, 1940) were introduced in Shanghai during this period. From 1942 to 1945, the dissemination of Disney's work in Shanghai was severely interrupted due to the outbreak of the Pacific War. At the time only a very few articles in newspapers and magazines mentioned Disney. From the surrender of Japan in 1945, to when the Communist Party took over the mainland in 1949, was the second 'golden era' for Disney's expansion in China. Thanks to Kuomintang's pro-American stance Hollywood films regained a significant market share in Shanghai, and the import of Disney's animated films, such as *Bambi* (David Hand, 1942), *The Three Caballeros* (Norman Ferguson, 1944), *Song of the South* (Harve Foster and Wilfred Jackson, 1946) and *Fun and Fancy Free* (Jack Kinney, Bill Roberts, Hamilton Luske and William Morgan, 1947), appealed to local audiences.

## The debut of *Snow White* in Shanghai

*Snow White* reached Shanghai in June 1938. Shanghai was a 'Solitary Island' at the time, where, fortunately, most cinema theatres were built in the foreign concessions and kept intact from Japanese invasion. The film was first released in Metropol Theatre (大上海大戲院) and Nanking Theatre (南京大戲院) in Shanghai on 2 June 1938 and soon screened in other local theatres. According to the archival records, *Snow White* attracted over 210,000 viewers in Shanghai, including 30,000 viewers in Metropol Theatre, 25,000 viewers in Nanking Theatre, 52,000 viewers in Rialto Theatre (麗都大戲院), 30,000 viewers in Uptown Theatre (平安大戲院), 20,000

**LYCEUM**  
 TO-MORROW at 3, 5.30 and 9.15 p.m.  
**HUSBANDS, WIVES  
 ---AND OTHERWISE!**

She thought so well of husbands  
 she had two at once — But what  
 did others think? Crosswise or  
 otherwise — It's laughwise!

**meet the wife**

Laura La Plante  
 Lew Cody  
 Joan Marsh  
 Harry Myers · Claud Allister · Wm. Janney  
 From Lynn Starling's Broadway Laugh  
 Hit. Directed by A. Leslie Pearce  
 Produced by ORBERT  
 A COLLINGIA Picture  
 (Theatre Imprint)

ADDED ATTRACTION  
**"WILD MAN'S LAND"**  
 (RAMBLING REPORTER)

**"MIDNIGHT IN TOYSHOP"**  
 (SILLY SYMPHONIES)

**"CURIOSITIES"**

BOOK NOW AT  
**MOUTRIE'S 10112 --- LYCEUM 70414**

FIGURE 10.1 Disney's *Midnight in Toyshop* advertised in *North China Daily News* on 23 December 1931.

viewers in Lafayette Cinema (辣斐大戲院), 18,000 viewers in The Capitol Theatre (光陸大戲院), 17,000 viewers in Zhejiang Theatre (浙江大戲院), 11,000 viewers in Empire Theatre (恩派亞大戲院) and 6,600 viewers in Willie's Theatre (威利大戲院).<sup>8</sup> It was such an unprecedented success that the theatres in Shanghai were filled to bursting with their audiences, despite five shows a day during the second round of the film's screening.<sup>9</sup> Metropoli Theatre and Nanking Theatre, the two largest theatres in Shanghai, screened the same film simultaneously, which only happened once before when Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936) was released.<sup>10</sup>

*Snow White* quickly became a critically acclaimed, commercial success in China. A film review in English published in *The China Press* on 3 June 1938, a major English-language newspaper in Shanghai of the time, recognizes it 'a masterpiece of color, photography and ingenuity ... Every element essential in a drama, a comedy and a musical, are contained in this perfect co-ordination of all known forms of entertainment, with the result that "Snow White" is as a document as the screen has ever shown.'<sup>11</sup> The earliest film review on *Snow White* in Chinese was published in *Li Daily* (力報) on 9 June 1938. The author described how the long-awaited film shook the whole city, keeping the audience spellbound. Describing *Snow White* as a successful educational film teaching the young audience that jealousy is poisonous and only love conquers all, the author added that not only is every frame visually stunning, but that the sound effects are vivid, the music is pleasant and the depiction of dwarfs is impressive, especially the characters Grumpy and Dopey.<sup>12</sup>

Besides the charm of the film itself, the localized advertising and marketing campaigns also contributed to its significant box-office success within China. Wan Baiwu, the son of Wan Guchan, one of the Chinese animation's pioneers, recalled that during *Snow White*'s premiere in Shanghai, 'the film was advertised everywhere, in magazines, newspapers and broadcast programs'.<sup>13</sup> For example, *The China Press* advertised two posters of *Snow White* on 2 and 3 June 1938 when the film was just released (Figures 10.2 and 10.3).<sup>14</sup> *Nanghai Yinxing*, an influential cinema weekly newspaper in Shanghai, published a series of articles covering the different aspects of the film that it believed would amuse the local Chinese audience.<sup>15</sup> Some articles involved playfully teasing the characters of the seven dwarfs, such as 'Dwarfs are Too Lazy to Wash Faces' and 'Dopey Doesn't Want to Talk'.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, it is interesting to note that in those articles 'Snow White' was often translated from English into the local dialect 'Snow Sister' (雪姐兒 *xuě jiě'r*) instead of a more literal translation such as the 'princess Snow White', which, as a phrasing strategy that advertised and promoted the film, made the character more appealing to the audience.


To promote *Snow White* in China, the Disney company issued a unique film handbook in Chinese on 5 May 1938, nearly one month before the film's release date. With over forty pages of content, the handbook includes

Air-  
Cooled  
Tel. 84133

# NANKING-METROPOL

Air-  
Conditioned  
Tel. 93322

Opening **TODAY!** — Simultaneously  
at 2:30, 5:30 and 9 p.m.



*A glorious new world*  
of beauty, thrill and sheer enchantment awaits you!... Out of the wizardry  
of Walt Disney's creative genius has come the miracle in motion pictures  
... Three years in the making, it is destined to play to more millions of  
people throughout the world than any other picture... For YOU—man,  
woman or child, it will be your most treasured experience in a theatre.

**WALT DISNEY'S**  
first full length feature production  
**SNOW WHITE**  
and the **SEVEN DWARFS**

*Wonderously filmed in all the glories of marvelous*  
**MULTIPLANE TECHNICOLOR**

Distributed by  
RKO-RADIO Pictures

Note: By Order of The Censors,  
Children Under 14 Must Be  
Accompanied By Adults.

©W.D.P.

**Book and Come Early!**

FIGURE 10.2 The poster of *Snow White* in *The China Press* on 2 June 1938.



Air-Cooled  
Tel. 84133

**NANKING-METROPOL**

Air-Conditioned  
Tel. 93322

**NOW PLAYING—Simultaneously 2.30, 5.30 & 9 p.m.!**  
EXTRA MORNING MATINEES TOMORROW and SUNDAY at 10:30!

*Walt Disney's*  
**FIRST FULL LENGTH FEATURE PRODUCTION**

**SNOW WHITE**  
*and the*  
**SEVEN DWARFS**

*The Screen's Supreme Thrill!*

1,000 artists worked three years to give you this once-in-a-lifetime show! . . . A full hour and a half of the most enthralling entertainment you ever experienced . . . truly the miracle in motion pictures!

Distributed by  
RKO RADIO Pictures

Hear Snow White and the dwarfs in their original rendition of the songs now sweeping the broadcasts!

Wonderously filmed in all the glory of the marvelous  
**MULTIPLANE TECHNICOLOR**

Note: By Order Of The Censors, Children Under 14 Must Be Accompanied By Adults.

FIGURE 10.3 The poster of *Snow White* in *The China Press* on 3 June 1938.

the music scores of three well-known theme songs, forty black-and-white images, fourteen colour images and the translated film transcripts, which could be purchased at the theatres and the main bookstores in Shanghai. Besides the handbook, some derivative products of the characters were distributed along with the film. For example, two fabrics printed with the

figures of Snow White or the dwarfs were designed to easily transform into a puppet by being filled and stitched together. Printed on the top of the puppets, 'Snow White' was also translated via the local Shanghai dialect into the phrase 'dolly girl' (洋囡囡 *yáng nān nān*), in order to better accommodate and engage the Shanghai audience.

With Snow White and the dwarfs becoming publicly recognized in Shanghai in the late 1930s and 1940s, the local business began to utilize their images to attract customers. For instance, on the same day of *Snow White*'s release in Shanghai, there were at least eight advertisements published in *The China Press* that employed Snow White and the dwarfs as the celebrity endorsers to promote their brands and products, spanning from food and housewares to daily service (Figure 10.4).<sup>17</sup>

Besides this, various elements of the film, such as the sets and settings, costumes and props, lightings and music, were adopted by local children's playgrounds, ballrooms, restaurants and clubs, as the selling points that differentiated these venues from competitors. For instance, the Sincere company advertised its children's playground by highlighting that 'it is a happy world for children, where all the settings are as the same as the film *Snow White*'.<sup>18</sup> Park Hotel Shanghai also addressed in its advertisement that 'the music, lightings, settings and costumes in our Sky Terrace Hall are reproduced faithfully as what they appeared in the original film *Snow White*'.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, some merchants even hired actresses for their venues to imitate Snow White to amuse the customers. Victory Ballroom, for instance, advertised in the local newspapers that 'Princess Snow White will be showing up on 22nd October night, and anyone who wants to meet her needs to come early to secure a place.'<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, during the late 1930s and 1940s, 'Snow White' was registered as a trademark for numerous local products, including 'Snow White' sweets, 'Snow White' Eskimo Toffee, 'Snow White' moisturizers, 'Snow White' fragrant powder, 'Snow White' linen, 'Snow White' cigarette and so forth. The use of these trademarks, of course, had never been granted by the Disney company, but usually they were announced through the local mainstream media. For example, the 'Snow White' Eskimo Toffee was first advertised in *The Sin Wan Pao* (新聞報) on 2 June 1938, the same day as the film's release. The advertisement is composed of an illustration of Snow White and the dwarfs carrying a large box of 'Snow White' Toffee and a slogan on the bottom 'Try a "Snow White" Eskimo Toffee when you go to watch *Snow White*.' The advertisement indeed was an ingenious design, which was placed right next to the film poster, maintaining the continuity with the image and, at the same time, opening up a dialogue with the customers.<sup>21</sup>

The 'Snow White' cigarette is another interesting example of how Snow White and the dwarfs were represented and utilized in local advertising. Advertisements of the 'Snow White' cigarette were extensively printed in



FIGURE 10.4 The advertisements utilizing *Snow White's* images published in *The China Press* on 2 June 1938.

various newspapers and magazines between December 1938 and April 1939. Borrowing the classic frame from the film where the dwarfs find Snow White sleeping in their bedroom, the earliest version altered the seven dwarfs from looking at Snow White to looking at two packets of 'Snow White' cigarettes. Another impressive version was published in January 1939 in *The Society Daily* (社會報), in which Snow White is seen holding a cigarette and enjoying smoking.<sup>22</sup>

In August 1938, the Jackson & Brothers company (吉遜行) made a formal announcement through the *Sin Wan Pao* about the registration of 'Snow White' as the trademark for its latest cosmetic powder. The 'Snow White' powder soon became popular throughout Shanghai, thanks to the effective

endorsement by Snow White, who, as claimed by the film, had skin as white as snow. Aimed at young modern women, the manufacturer claimed that with its magic pink and white power all the skin imperfections would be corrected, which perfectly fitted the customers' impression of Snow White. In its first advertisement published in the *Sin Wan Pao* on 22 August 1938, the benefits of the powder were addressed by accompanying text, as well as by the images of Snow White and a modern woman.<sup>23</sup> A later version issued on 31 August 1938 employed the seven dwarfs surrounding a tin of 'Snow White' powder with different postures, accompanied by the slogan 'if you want to be as beautiful as Snow White, please apply the Snow White powder' (Figure 10.5).<sup>24</sup>

The incredible popularity of *Snow White* also aroused the interest of the local artists, and 'Snow White' became a heated topic in literary and artistic creation at the time. One of the most famous work was a caricature titled 'Snow White's Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea', created by Changmin Ni and published in *Shanghai Daily* on 25 December 1938 (Figure 10.6).<sup>25</sup> As indicated by the title, this work is based on a Chinese Taoist myth 'the Eight Immortals crossing the Sea', a story dating back to the Yuan Dynasty (1200 CE).<sup>26</sup> In Ni's caricature, Snow White, equipped with a magic lotus flower, stands at the stern of a boat, while the seven dwarfs hold the different magic weapons just like their counterparts in the 'Eight Immortals'. This image, in fact, perfectly symbolizes how the film *Snow White* crossed the Pacific Ocean from the United States and eventually arrived in China – a journey of resourcefulness, where the key players involved used their wits to make the most of what was available.

## The remake *Chinese Snow White*

Filled with admiration about the tremendous commercial success of Disney's *Snow White*, Xinhua Film Company, the most significant film production company in Shanghai during the 1930s and 1940s, decided to invest a live-action remake, *Chinese Snow White* (also translated as *Chinese Princess Snow White*). Released in 1940, the film was directed by Wu Yonggang, while Chen Juanjuan, a well-known child star and marketed as the Chinese Shirley Temple, starred as Snow White.

To better accommodate a local audience and reflect the social circumstance of the time, there are two significant changes from Disney's *Snow White*. First, *Chinese Snow White* is a contemporary story set during the Republican period of China (1912–49), which is a complete departure from the original historical European setting. Consequently, instead of being a princess, Snow White is portrayed as a local girl who grew up in a wealthy family. Second, rather than mining for jewels, the seven dwarfs in the Chinese remake devote themselves to the act of 'removing' the mountains. This has potential associations with the well-known Chinese fable 'The Foolish Old Man





**FIGURE 10.5** ‘Snow White’ powder advertised in *The Sin Wan Pao* on 31 August 1938.



FIGURE 10.6 The caricature 'Snow White's Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea', 1938.

Removes the Mountains', which advocates perseverance, determination and willpower.

At the start of the film, with a definite educational purpose, *Chinese Snow White* attempts to teach the audience that only hard work, collaboration and selfless actions can bring happiness.<sup>27</sup> What is most striking is that the romantic plot between Snow White and the prince – which is so key to the Disney version of the narrative – is entirely removed in *Chinese Snow White*. For Chinese nationals in the period, a hard-working and revolutionary proletarian was a more convincing hero, as opposed to a love-struck prince. In the remake, the prince is therefore replaced by Xiao Yi, who, as a worker in the kitchen, not only saves Snow White but also indoctrinates her and the dwarfs with proletarian ideology.

*Chinese Snow White* was also made during the 'Solitary Island' period. This meant that the film, on the one hand, intended to deliver a message of anti-Japanese sentiment and national salvation and, on the other hand, had to be both entertaining and subtle to survive in the Japanese and foreign concessions which occupied Shanghai. If the stepmother and the cruel doctor symbolize both darkness and dictatorship, then the seven dwarfs and Xiao Yi represent the strengthening and collaboration of the proletariat. Working as mountain 'removers', the seven dwarfs were also

an excellent metaphor that responded to the idea of Mao Zedong's 'New Democratic Revolution': a collaboration of proletarian workers, peasants, small business owners and the nationally based capitalists, which aimed to overcome the three mountains of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism weighing down on the Chinese people.

Although *Chinese Snow White* is visually realistic in many ways, the director maintained some degree of exaggeration as in Disney's original feature. Doors and windows are all blown open by the power of Sneezzy's sneeze, Bashful blows a myriad of bubbles from his mouth after drinking soap water and the face in a photo – which appears in the background of the scene – changes to a dramatic expression whenever the antagonist appears on scene. Other parts of the film also stay faithful to the original, especially the interior of the dwarfs' cottage, the depiction of the forest and the lake. Moreover, just like Disney's *Snow White*, the Chinese remake was also influenced by German expressionism. Scenes such as when Snow White flees from home, and those which involve her murderous stepmother, use shadows to create a depressing atmosphere and reflect Snow White's fear. Interestingly, *Chinese Snow White* imitates the scene in the Disney film where the princess kisses the dwarfs. However, this scene loses the charm of the animated version once you realize that the dwarfs are actually played by seven full-size male adults, and the role of Snow White is performed by an 11-year-old girl.

At first glance it appears as if *Chinese Snow White* is a contradiction; this is a film that tries to copy Disney's *Snow White*, while also rejecting it. While the film kept the fidelity of the original animation in its setting, character movement and designs, it also removed certain elements and changed the story to suit its prospective audience in China. Despite its apparent irreconcilability, as an experiment and a film *Chinese Snow White* works well regardless, showing how successfully Chinese studios could imitate Hollywood films despite the difficulties and hardships of war faced by filmmakers and audiences in the period.

## The first Chinese animated feature *Princess Iron Fan*

*Princess Iron Fan*, directed by the Wan Brothers (Wan Guchan and Wan Laiming), and produced by Xinhua Film Company and Shangyuan Company (上元企業公司), is another example to show the influence and indigenization of Disney's *Snow White* in China. The eighty-minute-long film premiered in Metropol Theatre and Astor Theatre (滬光大戲院) on 19 November 1941, making it the first Asian animated feature-length film.<sup>28</sup> The film is based on the chapters 'Monkey King Makes Three Attempts to

Borrow the Plantain Fan' from the Chinese classical novel *Journey to the West* (西遊記). In Wan's memoirs *Money King and Me*, he recalled how Disney's *Snow White* motivated his creation of *Princess Iron Fan*, noting that 'since Americans could produce their western style *Snow White*, we, of course, can make our own Chinese style *Princess Iron Fan*. If we are successful, it will be fascinating for the audience to enjoy two princesses and compare them from the stories to the artistic styles.'<sup>29</sup> Information about the thought process behind the Wan Brothers' animation strategy can also be revealed through discussions in his memoirs. Wan claimed, 'in term of the content, my brothers and I believe that we should develop our own path, differentiating from Disney's. It is interesting to watch Disney's animations for the first time, but it soon becomes boring if you watch them more times. I do not like the stories, but I have to repeatedly watch them, because besides the stories there are too many techniques I want to borrow.'<sup>30</sup> Hence, in order to make *Princess Iron Fan*, the Wan Brothers decided to tell a Chinese story for a Chinese audience, while also employing the technologies from Disney's *Snow White*.

*Princess Iron Fan*, which was both a critical and commercial success, was screened in Shanghai for over a month. It was widely praised by numerous newspapers and magazines as the Chinese version of *Snow White*. For instance, *Popular Cinema News* (大眾影訊) commented that the Wan Brothers successfully imitated the methods of Disney's *Snow White*, producing the frames beautifully and vividly, just like a Hollywood film.<sup>31</sup> As the first animated feature film in China, an analysis of the film reveals the appropriation of techniques learned by observation of Disney's animation. First, just like Disney's *Snow White*, rotoscoping was partially applied in *Princess Iron Fan* to capture realistic gestures and movements. As Wan described, first they filmed the live-action performance by the actors and then drew the movements frame by frame based on their footage.<sup>32</sup> Second, the Wan Brothers applied the synchronization of sound and image in *Princess Iron Fan*, techniques which had been fully realized in Disney's own animated feature. For instance, a deep and slow melody played by trombone synchronizes with the appearance of the fatty Pigsy, a humorous effect achieved through the arrangement of the audio and visual elements. Accurate lip sync was also used in *Princess Iron Fan*, a topic of discussion that Wan introduced to *United China Movie News* when he pointed out that, if the dialogue of the character was 'I and you', a key frame of the mouth with the shape of 'I' would be drawn, as well as the frames 'and' and 'you'. Then the frames passed to the animation team, who completed the in-betweens. All the dialogues and songs in *Princess Iron fan* had been done by this way.<sup>33</sup>

Even though *Princess Iron Fan* appropriated various aspects of Disney's *Snow White*, it also explored Chinese culture, aesthetics and visual language. The landscape of *Princess Iron Fan* is a Chinese ink-and-wash painting,



FIGURE 10.7 The landscape of *Princess Iron Fan*.

in which trees and mountains are highly stylized through applying simple brushstrokes and by the faintness and pressure of ink (Figure 10.7). The character design of the film was heavily influenced by traditional Chinese opera. The Princess, who is wrapped in an armour-look dress, is very similar to the operatic costume typically used for military women in Peking opera (Figure 10.8). Just like *Chinese Snow White*, *Iron Fan* also carries anti-Japanese sentiments. As Wan pointed out, conquering Bull Demon King is a powerful metaphor that suggests the image of Chinese people triumphing over their Japanese invaders, eventually winning the war through the collaborations across the country.<sup>34</sup>

*Princess Iron Fan* certainly is not a flawless animation but given the time and circumstances under which it was produced, it is indeed an impressive animated feature film. Deeply influenced by Disney's *Snow White*, *Princess Iron Fan* borrowed a variety of animation techniques from the former film while telling a different, specifically Chinese, story. However, what is most significant about *Princess Iron Fan* is its uniquely Chinese approach to animation too, combining traditional Chinese aesthetics with the historical and political contexts of the period.

## Conclusion

The 1930s and 1940s were a period of cultural and artistic prosperity and rapid political change in bustling Shanghai, during which time Disney





FIGURE 10.8 The Princess wears an armour-look dress similar to the operatic costume.

animation marched into the city and captured the hearts of the local audience. The importance of *Snow White* was recognized in Shanghai almost immediately and still provides inspiration to new animators and audiences, over eighty years after its initial release. The unique time period and social circumstances of the city provided possibilities for the popularization of *Snow White*, which in turn nourished the local economic, cultural and artistic innovations. Using historical examples and archives, in this chapter I have emphasized the significance of *Snow White* to Chinese film and animation. For those interested in the historical development of Chinese animation, the reinterpretation and indigenization of Disney's *Snow White* provides an early example of the relationship between Hollywood and China, illustrating how economics, society, culture and art are being continually developed and reshaped within the context of globalization.

## Notes

- 1 See 'Snow White in China', *Movietone* 8, no. 29 (1939): 1204. (白雪公主在中國, 電聲); Shanghai Library Document Supply Centre, ed., *Retrospections of Walt Disney in Shanghai: A City Chronicle of ROC* (Shanghai: Shanghai Scientific and Technological Literature Press, 2016), 45. (上海图书馆文献提供中心, 迪士尼上海往事: 民国时期的城市记忆, 上海科学技术文献出版社).

- 2 Marie-Claire Bergère, *Shanghai: China's Gateway to Modernity*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 2.
- 3 J. A. Van Brakle, 'Mickey the Mouse' Liked by Britons', *North China Daily News* (6 February 1930): 10.
- 4 See: 'The Father of Mickey Mouse: Walt Disney's Successful Career', *Movietone* 6, no. 7 (1937): 377. (米老鼠的製作者: 華爾特狄斯耐成功經過, 電聲); 'Mickey Mouse Becomes a Star', *Linglong* 3, no. 24 (1933): 1262. (米老鼠成明星, 玲瓏) (This and all translations from Chinese are by the author.)
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- 6 'Midnight in Toyshop', Advertisement, *North China Daily News* (23 December 1931): 25.
- 7 Gang Qin, 'Disney's Animation in Shanghai in the Republic of China during the Era of 'Sound Animation': Based on Lu Xun's Dairy', *Modern Chinese Literature Studies*, no. 7 (2017): 38–49. (秦刚, 有声卡通时代的迪士尼动画在民国上海——以鲁迅日记为线索, 中国现代文学研究丛刊).
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- 12 Cang Luo, 'Review: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs', *Li Daily* (9 June 1938): 2. (澹洛, 影評: 白雪公主和七侏儒, 力報).
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- 15 Nanghai Yinxing, the cinema weekly newspaper, advertised the film *Snow White* on its front pages for three issues from 21 May to 4 June 1938.
- 16 See: He, 'Dwarfs Are Too Lazy to Wash Faces', *Nanghai Yinxing* 1, no. 5 (1938): 1. (赫, 矮子懶洗面, 南海銀星); Wei Ming, 'Dopey Doesn't Want to Talk', *Nanghai Yinxing* 1, no. 6 (1938): 1. (煒明, 不想講話的啞子, 南海銀星).
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- GARDEN', Advertisement, *China Press* (2 June 1938): 9; 'YUEN TAI & CO.', Advertisement, *China Press* (2 June 1938): 9.
- 18 'Sincere Company's Children Playground', Advertisement, *Sin Wan Pao* (17 December 1938): 19. (兒童世界, 新聞報).
  - 19 'The Park Hotel's Sky Terrace Hall', Advertisement, *Oriental Daily* (25 June 1945): 2.
  - 20 'Victory Ballroom', Advertisement, *Li Daily* (22 October 1938): 6.
  - 21 'Snow White' Eskimo Toffee, Advertisement, *Sin Wan Pao* (2 June 1938): 13. (白雪公主北極太妃, 新聞報).
  - 22 'Snow White' cigarette, Advertisement, *Sin Wan Pao* (21 December 1938): 16. (白雪公主香煙, 新聞報); 'Snow White' cigarette, Advertisement, *Society Daily* (24 January 1939): 2. (白雪公主香煙, 社會報).
  - 23 'Snow White Powder', Advertisement, *Sin Wan Pao* (22 August 1938): 14. (白雪公主香粉, 新聞報).
  - 24 'Snow White Powder', Advertisement, *Sin Wan Pao* (31 August 1938): 1. (白雪公主香粉, 新聞報).
  - 25 Changmin Ni, 'Snow White's Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea', Caricature, *Shanghai Daily* (25 December 1938): 15. (倪長民, 白雪公主的八仙過海, 申報).
  - 26 In the original story of 'the Eight Immortals crossing the Sea', the eight immortals, including He Xiang, Cao Guojiu, Li Tiegua, Lan Caihe, Lü Dongbin, Zhang Guolao, Han Xiangzi and Han Zhongli, decide to use their magic weapons to cross the sea when they come back from a banquet. Li Tiegua uses his walking stick, Han Zhongli uses his palm-leaf fan, Zhang Guolao uses his paper donkey, Lan Caihe uses his basket, Lü Dongbin uses his long sword, Han Xiangzi uses his flute, Han Xiangzi uses his jade and He Xiang uses her lotus flower. Thanks to their ingenuity, they all successfully cross the sea. The combination of Snow White and the seven dwarfs and the eight immortals is ingenious. Not only because both the stories have eight characters but also because Snow White and He Xiang are the only females in both groups.
  - 27 Yuhua Li, 'Film Review for *Chinese Snow White*', *Women Weekly* 2, no. 3 (1940): 20–1. (李玉華, 中國的白雪公主影評, 婦女界).
  - 28 'Princess Iron Fan', *Movie Daily New* (19 November 1941): 3 (鐵扇公主, 電影日報).
  - 29 Laiming Wan and Guohun Wan, *Monkey King and Me* (Taiyuan: Beiyue Literature & Art Press, 1985), 88. (萬籟鳴, 萬國魂, 我與孫悟空, 太原: 北岳文藝出版社).
  - 30 *Ibid.*, 70.
  - 31 Zuixia Jin, 'Princess Iron Fan Animated Film', *Popular Cinema News* 2, no. 21 (1941): 583. (金醉霞, '鐵扇公主'卡通片, 大眾影訊).



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- 33 'The Experience of Making *Princess Iron Fan*', *United China Movie News* 1, no. 9 (1941): 67. (我們繪製'鐵扇公主'的經過, 國聯影訊).
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